

# The Ph.C. Degree: An Affirmation of Chiropractic Philosophy, 1908-1968

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The Philosopher of Chiropractic (Ph.C.) degree was first offered in 1908 by the Palmer School of Chiropractic (PSC). B. J. Palmer was awarded the first Ph.C., on January 2, 1908, by the PSC students, faculty, and Board of Directors. In the Spring of that same year, George T. Callas became the first student to earn the degree. The requirements for the Ph.C. changed during its roughly sixty year life. Originally, the degree was awarded instead of the Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.) degree to students who graduated with high scholastic achievement. Later the course of study leading to the degree came to resemble traditional graduate education, requiring post-D.C. course work and the completion of a thesis. The Ph.C. was offered at chiropractic schools other than the PSC, primarily those of the "straight" philosophy. The Ph.C. was valued by those who saw philosophy as being a more crucial element of chiropractic than art and science. The degree's length of life roughly coincided with that of the father of chiropractic philosophy, B.J. Palmer. The Ph.C. ceased being offered in the middle 1960's, a few years after B.J. Palmer's death.

In 1907, an announcement appeared in *The Chiropractor* stating that the Palmer School of Chiropractic (Palmer) would begin offering a new degree, effective January 1, 1908. The degree would be called the Philosopher of Chiropractic (Ph.C.) (*The Chiropractor* 1907, 55). This paper will explore the sixty year history of the Ph.C., from its first recipients, to its demise in the 1960s.

While the Ph.C. was offered by a number of chiropractic schools, it was offered by Palmer the longest, from 1908 to 1968. The other schools that offered the degree were primarily of the same "straight" philosophy as Palmer (Russell W. Gibbons, letter to the author, June 1987), and according to Gibbons (personal conversation, 8 December 1987), the requirements for the degree were probably similar or the same. They were schools that, like Palmer, placed a great emphasis upon chiropractic philosophy.

In addition to Palmer, schools known to have offered the Ph.C. include Cleveland Chiropractic College, Nashville College of Chiropractic, Ratledge College of Chiropractic (Russell W. Gibbons, letter to the author, June 1987), Colorado Chiropractic University (Colorado Chiropractic University 1934, 3), Davenport School of Chiropractic (Davenport School of Chiropractic 1928), Lincoln Chiropractic College (Lincoln Chiropractic College 1931, 19), Los Angeles College of Chiropractic (Los Angeles College of Chiropractic 1922, 11), and Peerless College of Chiropractic (Peerless College of Chiropractic 1925). The history of the Palmer Ph.C. is representative of the degree's history at other schools. This paper will primarily be concerned with the Palmer Ph.C.

B. J. Palmer held the first Ph.C., which seems appropriate since he was arguably the father of chiropractic philosophy. In an auspicious ceremony on January 2, 1908, the students, faculty, and Board of Directors of Palmer conferred upon B. J. Palmer, President of the School, the first Ph.C. degree. It was engraved in six different colored inks and several water colors (*The Chiropractor* 1908a).

George T. Callas received the first earned Ph.C. in the spring of 1908. Interestingly, Callas received the Ph.C. instead of a Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.) degree (*The Chiropractor* 1908b). Callas went on to practice in Kansas City (Palmer School of Chiropractic 1920).

It has been suggested by Merwyn V. Zarbuck (personal conversation, 26 August 1987) that in the beginning, D. D. Palmer emphasized the science of chiropractic, and B. J. Palmer the philosophy. The early status associated with the Ph.C. degree would seem to support this suggestion. The Ph.C. was a higher degree than the D.C., and was originally given instead of a D.C. to those students who were at the top of their classes (*The Chiropractor* 1907), such as was the case with George T. Callas. The purpose of the Ph.C. degree was to serve as an incentive to students to delve more deeply into the intricacies of chiropractic philosophy (*The Chiropractor* 1908a).

Originally, the Ph.C. could be earned two ways, by high scholastic achievement in the D.C. program, or through post-D.C. work. Students who completed the D.C. program with an average of 98 percent or higher on final examinations were conferred the Ph.C. instead of the D.C. Chiropractors could earn a Ph.C. by completing a three month course and scoring 90 percent or higher on its final examination (*The Chiropractor* 1907).

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Requirements remained essentially unchanged until 1914 when the post-D.C. program was eliminated, and the only way to earn the Ph.C. was through high scholastic achievement in the D.C. program (Palmer School of Chiropractic 1914, 23). By the middle of the decade it must have become clear that the title of "doctor" would be necessary if chiropractors were to compete with other health care providers for patients, because in 1916 a change was made at Palmer so that students who graduated with high scholastic achievement received D.C.s in addition to Ph.C. degrees (Palmer School of Chiropractic 1916, 27).

In 1922, the requirements for the Ph.C. changed. Instead of high scholastic achievement, students who sought the Ph.C. were required to write a 15,000 word thesis on some aspect of chiropractic philosophy (Palmer School of Chiropractic 1922, 36). This remained the requirement until 1940 when the Ph.C. program became exclusively post-D.C., more closely resembling traditional graduate education. The program lasted four months, and culminated with the written thesis. Admission required that the applicant hold a D.C. degree from a reputable chiropractic school, with a grade average of "A" and no grade less than "B" (Palmer School of Chiropractic 1940, 19). By 1960 the program had grown to nine months in length (Palmer School of Chiropractic 1960, 13).

Thus, the Ph.C. was transformed from merely an academic honor to a certificate that post-D.C. philosophic research had been performed. The shift in requirements was probably due to an attempt to make the Ph.C. compare more favorably with the Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy). In fact, during the 1960s, the name of the degree was briefly changed from Philosopher of Chiropractic to Doctor of Philosophy of Chiropractic (Palmer School of Chiropractic 1960, 13), but then back to Philosopher of Chiropractic (Palmer College of Chiropractic 1961, 35).

During the 1960s a series of events occurred which led to the demise of the Ph.C. First, B. J. Palmer died in 1961. While B. J. Palmer's death did not contribute directly to the Ph.C.'s downfall, it does seem to have figuratively signaled the beginning of the end of the Ph.C. As was noted earlier, B. J. Palmer's ties with chiropractic philosophy were very strong.

The B. J. Palmer Clinic and Clear View sanitarium, primary sites at which the degree's program of study were based, closed shortly thereafter. According to H. Ronald Frogley (telephone interview, 13 July 1987), Donald P. Kern (personal interview, 12 May 1987) and Galen R. Price (personal conversation, 6 August 1987), requirements for the Ph.C.

were informally relaxed, and the degree began to be awarded indiscriminately, sometimes without the program of study and thesis being completed. This practice would later come back to haunt Ph.C. offering schools when they applied for Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) accreditation.

According to Frogley (telephone interview, 13 July 1987), the Palmer administration decided that the D.C. should be the highest degree offered in the middle 1960s, a position with which the CCE would later concur (A. Earl Homewood, letter to the author, September 1987). While the degree was officially offered at Palmer until 1970 (Palmer College of Chiropractic 1970, 97), apparently no Ph.C. was awarded after 1968 (Bernard L. Cirullo, letter to the author, February 1988; G. Douglas Valentine, letter to the author, January 1988).

The awarding of the Ph.C. had become so informal during the 1960s that in many cases no academic records were kept of who had received the degree. However, Wendall L. Ball, Bernard L. Cirullo, and G. Douglas Valentine appear to have been among the last to receive Ph.C.s in 1968 (Cirullo, letter to the author, February 1988; Valentine, letter to the author, January 1988; Palmer College of Chiropractic 1987).

In 1968 the CCE stated "The Council does not recognize Ph.C. degrees and opposes their use." (Council on Chiropractic Education 1976, 44) In addition to the Ph.C., some chiropractic colleges awarded other non-D.C. degrees, the Master of Chiropractic and Bachelor of Therapeutic Arts. The CCE's objection to these degrees was that the D.C., being the first professional degree, should not have to share recognition with other degrees awarded at the same institutions (A. Earl Homewood, letter to the author, September 1987).

Additionally, the CCE felt that the Ph.C. was not an earned degree, but rather an honorary or spurious degree, and therefore should not be listed as a credential by officials of colleges accredited by it (E. M. Saunders, letter to the author, September 1987). However, the CCE has apparently softened its stance; in 1987 it stated "Honorary degrees shall be so designated wherever the degree shall appear." (Council on Chiropractic Education 1987, III-7)

The Ph.C. was a degree of its times. It was created by a great chiropractic philosopher, B. J. Palmer, and enjoyed its heyday at the peak of the "straight" influence in chiropractic thinking. It was sought by individuals who believed that there was more to chiropractic than science, and while it is no longer offered by any chiropractic college, it still is valued by many. Some recipients of the Ph.C. still list it as a credential, and others express their appreciation of what the degree stood for in different ways.

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## 'The last Ph.C.?' In the finest B.J. Palmer Iconoclasm it may be Ben CiRullo, Ph.C.

Bernard L. CiRullo might be out of a H.I.O. Directory circa 1938. In a state where diversity is a cultural way of life, he stands out with the simple designation of "Palmer Graduate Chiropractor." The California chiropractor also does not use his D.C. (Palmer, 1954) on professional letterheads, but simply, "Ph.C."

He might, in fact, be one of the last "official" Philosophers of Chiropractic (see related paper by Robert J. Stout) with that official designation. His diploma was issued in 1967, just about the time that B.J. Palmer's son Dave was seeking to adhere to CCE regulations to obtain recognition for chiropractic's first and largest educational institution. One of the less-than-momentous events was the discontinuance of the Ph.C. degree.

CiRullo may be an appropriate prototype for the "last Ph.C." Following graduation from Colorado's Regis College, he went to Davenport to obtain the education that would in fact follow a long family tradition of several generations.

The CiRullos were of that European bonesetting tradition, which in their family was centered in Sicily. His grandfather emigrated to the United States in 1906 and settled near Pueblo, Colorado where he worked in the huge Colorado Fuel & Iron facility and later for the railroad which serviced the plant. Later his son, who was also to work for the steel mill and became active in union affairs, recalled the family tradition as explained to him by his bonesetter father:

He would tell the person to lay on the edge of the bed so his head would hang over. Then dad would place a pillow under the persons stomach so the back was arched. Warm olive oil was rubbed lightly on the back.

Then dad would spread his first finger and place it on one side of the spine. The second and third fingers were placed on the other side of the spine or vertebra. Then he would start at the top of the persons neck where the vertebrae begin. With a pulling action and pressure on the person's spine, he would go down about eight inches. Feeling the vertebrae with his 'second' finger he would use first and third as guides on either side of the spine.

He would continue down from the base of skull until he detected a vertebra out of place or out of line. He would mark them, then go down to the person's tail-bone.

Dr. CiRullo, an AHC member who attended the 1988 Conference at Cleveland College, and who self-published a 96-page book entitled "The Ethics of Chiropractic" in 1979, recalled that the procedure in Italian was known as "chiraurga," or "persona che aggiustara ossa nella schiena un vertebra." Simply, the person who adjusts bones in the spine or vertebra or dislocated bones.

For those vertebrae out of line from the shoulders down, CiRullo's father wrote (in explaining the art which he in turn had learned from his father in the generational tradition), he would:

Tell them to lay on their stomach on the bed. He would use his palm or his fist to put pressure on the one out of line. This may seem strange to you but it is a fact. It was a rough way of doing it, but he got the people well by putting the spine and vertebrae in place.

While the person was laying on their stomach, grandfather would double up his fist of the right hand and place the knuckles so they would straddle the vertebra. Pressure was on the side where vertebra was out of line. Then he would talk to the person. ('Broken English' if they were Americans; Italian, Spanish, if they were not.) He would tell the person to breathe in and out, not 'adjusting' until the person relaxed. Then with a sudden jog, he would push the vertebra down and side-ways; right or left depending on which way he wanted it to go.

Then he would use the palm of his hand to put pressure straight down and would then release it.

California chiropractor CiRullo may be part of an exclusive European tradition of generational bonesetters—familiar "village doctors" through much of the 18th and 19th centuries, whose skill became one handed down through the medieval craft structure of "master to student," and largely recorded through oral history. The Tietzens of South Dakota, the Reeses of Ohio, the Sweets of New England are all part of the same tradition, from other European cultures.

—R.W.G.

### Palmer College of Chiropractic

DAVENPORT, IOWA, U.S.A.

Know all men by these presents, that

**B. L. Cirullo, Jr.**

*has completed the course of study prescribed by the Faculty  
of this College and is therefore awarded the degree of*

**Philosopher of Chiropractic**

*with all the Rights, Privileges, Honors and  
Marks of Distinction thereto pertaining here or elsewhere*

Davenport, Iowa,

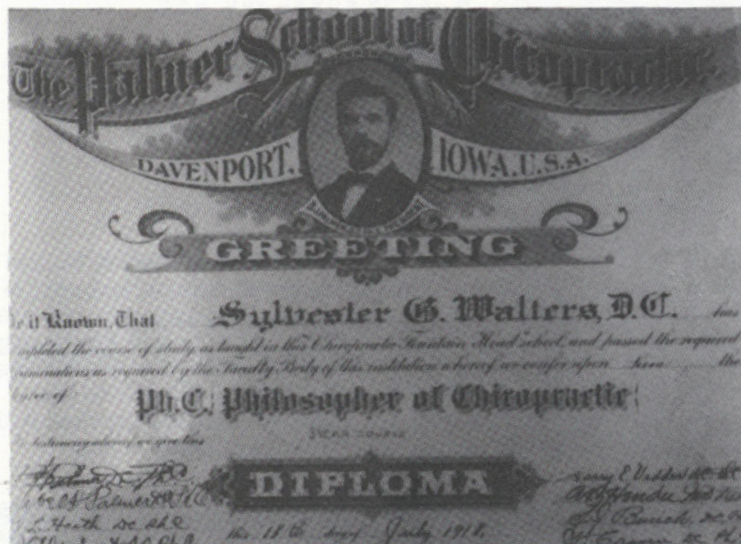
March 23, 1968

*David L. Palmer*  
PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE

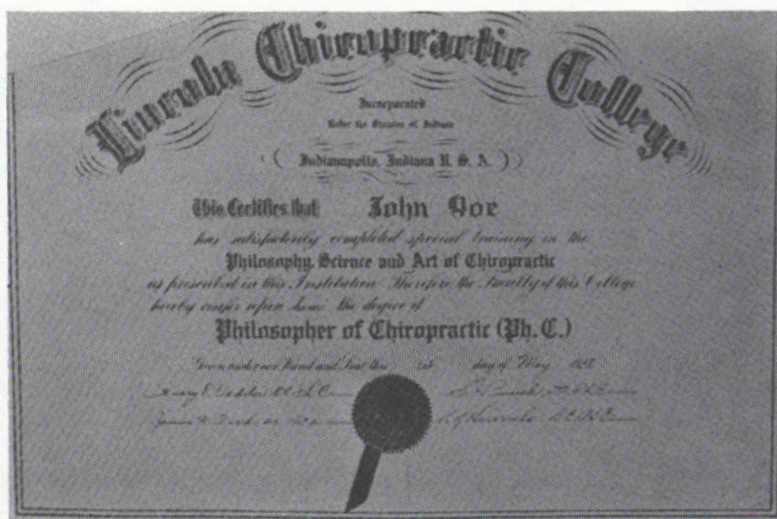


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ADMINISTRATIVE DEAN





Engraved in six different colored inks and several water colors, "the first Ph.C." went to B. J. Palmer, who would become the first of perhaps thousands of "D.C., Ph.C.s" for much of this century (right). The Palmer School conferred the Philosopher designation through the mid-60s, with varying resident scholarship and thesis requirements for the award.



Lincoln College in Indianapolis, born in the wake of a bitter ideological controversy between B. J. Palmer and four of his leading faculty members in the late 1920s, also conferred the Ph.C. The author has found a dozen other institutions that offered the degree prior to its demise with CCE encouragement some two decades ago.